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CROSS-SECTORAL THEME: TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY, CAPACITY-BUILDING, EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Letter dated 20 April 1998 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to submit to you the Declaration unanimously adopted by the International Conference on Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability,* organized in Thessaloniki, Greece, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Government of Greece, and held from 8 to 12 December 1997.

I would be grateful if the present letter and the attached Declaration could be issued as an official document, under item 4 of the agenda (cross-sectoral theme) of the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, held in New York from 20 April to 1 May 1998.

(Signed) Vassilis KASKARELIS
Deputy Permanent Representative of Greece
to the United Nations

* Circulated in the language of submission only.

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ANNEX

DECLARATION OF THESSALONIKI*

1. We, the participants from governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the civil society at large from 83 countries present at the International Conference on Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability, organized in Thessaloniki by UNESCO and the Government of Greece, from 8 to 12 December 1997, unanimously adopt the following Declaration.

We take note that:

2. The recommendations and action plans of the Belgrade Conference on Environmental Education (1975), the Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education (1977), the Moscow Conference on Environmental Education and Training (1987), and the Toronto World Congress for Education and Communication on Environment and Development (1992) are still valid and not fully explored.

3. Insufficient progress has been made five years after the Earth Summit in Rio as it has been recognized by the international community.

4. The Thessaloniki Conference has benefited from the numerous international, regional and national meetings held during 1997 in India, Thailand, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Greece and the Mediterranean region *inter alia*.

5. The vision of education and public awareness has been further developed, enriched and reinforced by the major UN Conferences: on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992); Human Rights (Vienna, 1993); Population and Development (Cairo, 1994); Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995); Women (Beijing, 1995) and Human Settlements (Istanbul, 1996), as well as the nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly (1997). The action plans of these conferences, as well as the special work programme of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development adopted in 1996, are to be implemented by national governments, civil society (including non-governmental organizations, youth, enterprises and the educational community), the United Nations system and other international organizations.

We reaffirm that:

6. In order to achieve sustainability, an enormous co-ordination and integration of efforts is required in a number of crucial sectors and rapid and radical change of behaviours and lifestyles, including changing consumption and production patterns. For this, appropriate education and public awareness should be recognised as one of the pillars of sustainability together with legislation, economy and technology.

7. Poverty makes the delivery of education and other social services more difficult and leads to population growth and environmental degradation. Poverty reduction is thus an essential goal and indispensable condition for sustainability.

8. A collective learning process, partnerships, equal participation and continuous dialogue are required among governments, local authorities, academia, enterprises, consumers, NGOs, media and other actors in order to raise awareness, search for alternatives and change behaviours and lifestyles, including consumption and production patterns, towards sustainability.

9. Education is an indispensable means to give to all women and men in the world the capacity to own their own lives, to exercise personal choice and responsibility, to learn throughout life without frontiers, be they geographical, political, cultural, religious, linguistic or gender.

10. The reorientation of education as a whole towards sustainability involves all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education in all countries. The concept of sustainability encompasses not only environment but also poverty, population, health, food security, democracy, human rights and peace. Sustainability is, in the final analysis, a moral and ethical imperative in which cultural diversity and traditional knowledge need to be respected.

11. Environmental education, as developed within the framework of the Tbilisi recommendations and as it has evolved since then, addressing the entire range of global issues included in Agenda 21 and the major UN Conferences, has also been dealt with as education for sustainability. This allows that it may also be referred to as education for environment and sustainability.

12. All subject areas, including the humanities and the social sciences, need to address issues related to environment and sustainable development. Addressing sustainability requires a holistic, interdisciplinary approach which brings together the different disciplines and institutions while retaining their distinct identities.

13. While the basic content and action framework for environment and sustainability is largely in place, the translation of these parameters into action for education will need to take into account particular local, regional or national contexts. The reorientation of education as a whole called for in chapter 36 of Agenda 21 must involve not only the educational community, but also governments, financial institutions, and all other actors.

We recommend that:

14. Governments and leaders around the world honour the commitments already made during the series of United Nations conferences, and give to education the necessary means to fulfil its role in achieving a sustainable future.

15. Action plans for formal education for environment and sustainability with concrete targets and strategies for non-formal and informal education should be elaborated at national and local levels. Education should be an integral part of local Agenda 21 initiatives.

16. National councils for sustainable development and other relevant bodies give education, public awareness and training a central role for action including better coordination among the relevant national ministries and other entities, including major groups.

17. Governments and international, regional and national financial institutions, as well as the productive sector, be encouraged to mobilize additional resources and increase investments in education and public awareness. The establishment of special funds for education for sustainable development should be considered as a specific way to increase support and visibility.

18. All actors reinvest a portion of the savings from the greening process into strengthening of environmental education, information, public awareness and training programmes.

19. The scientific community play an active role in ensuring that the content of education and public awareness programmes is based on accurate, up-to-date information.

20. The media be sensitized and invited to mobilize its know-how and distribution channels to diffuse the key messages, while helping to translate the complexity of the issues into meaningful and understandable information to the public. The full potential of new information systems should be used properly for this purpose.

21. Schools be encouraged and supported to adjust their curricula to meet the needs for a sustainable future.

22. Non-governmental organizations be given adequate institutional and financial support in order to further mobilize people on issues of environment and sustainability, within communities and at national, regional and international levels.

23. All actors - governments, major groups, the education community, the United Nations system and other international organizations, the international financial institutions, *inter alia* - contribute to the implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21, and in particular to the work programme on education, public awareness and training of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

24. Special emphasis should be given to the strengthening and eventual reorientation of teacher training programmes and identification and sharing of innovative practices. Support should be given to research in interdisciplinary teaching methodologies and in assessing the impact of relevant educational programmes.

25. The United Nations system, including UNESCO and UNEP, in cooperation with international NGOs, major groups and all other actors, continue to give priority to education, public awareness and training for sustainability, in particular at national and local level.

26. A Thessaloniki International Award under the auspices of UNESCO be established to be given every second year for exemplary educational projects for environment and sustainability.

27. An international conference be held in 2007, after ten years, in order to assess the implementation and the progress of the suggested educational process.

We thank

28. the Government of Greece for having joined with UNESCO to organize the International Conference in Thessaloniki.

We request

29. the Government of Greece to transmit the outcome of this Conference to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its Sixth Session in April 1998.

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* UNESCO-EPD-97/CONF.401/CLD.2, 12 December 1997; Original: English

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